



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Review of Wicker's Witnesses to Faith

Citation for published version:

Goddard, H 2008, 'Review of Wicker's Witnesses to Faith: Martyrdom in Christianity and Islam', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, vol. 23, pp. 388-390.

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Journal of Contemporary Religion

Publisher Rights Statement:

© Goddard, H. (2008). Review of Wicker's Witnesses to Faith: Martyrdom in Christianity and Islam. Journal of Contemporary Religion, 23, 388-390.

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



Please refer to the published article for citation purposes.

Witnesses to Faith? Martyrdom in Christianity and Islam

Brian Wicker, ed., 2006

Aldershot: Ashgate

xiv + 166 pp., £40.00 (hb)

ISBN 0-7546-5667-5

'Witness' or 'Martyr', 'Shahid' in Arabic, is one of those words, like 'Prayer' (*Salat*), which is used by both Christians and Muslims, but does not necessarily mean exactly the same thing to the members of the two communities. The reflexive form of the verb in Arabic, 'istashhada' (literally 'to martyr oneself'), in particular, has acquired significant prominence in some Muslim circles in recent years, but would not necessarily be found in wide use in the Christian community. A comparative study of the concept in the two traditions is thus very timely and this volume, based on a series of discussions arranged over several years by the Chairman of the Council on Christian Approaches to Defence and Disarmament in the UK and hosted by the Dominican community at Blackfriars in Oxford, goes some way towards meeting this need.

After an introduction by the editor, the book's eight chapters are divided into three parts: Part I focuses on the historical development of the concept, and contains chapters about the different, competing understandings of *Jihad* and Martyrdom in early Islamic sources (Asma Asfaruddin), the

Please refer to the published article for citation purposes.

history and (mainly classical) interpretation of Christian martyrdom (jointly written by Anthony Harvey, Richard Finn, and Michael Smart), and an attempt at defining martyrdom on a comparative basis (although with a rather fuller discussion of Islamic thought than of Christian) (Harfiyah Haleem). Part II then focuses on more contemporary discussions, with a chapter on the implications for the concept of the events of 11 September 2001 – ‘still a noble army?’ – (the editor), a short Christian-Muslim dialogue about the veneration of martyrs (the editor and Harfiyah Haleem), and a discussion of literary approaches to martyrdom in the two traditions (the editor), illustrated by the plays of T. S. Eliot (“Murder in the Cathedral”) and the Egyptian writer Salah ‘Abd al-Sabur (the original Arabic title of whose 1965 play was “The Tragedy of al-Hallaj”, although the English translation by K. I. Semaan, “Murder in Baghdad”, perhaps over-emphasised the connection and similarity between the two plays). Part III tidies up a couple of loose ends, with a discussion of the Shi’i Muslim perspective on martyrdom (Abolfazl Ezzati) and a joint discussion of “Martyrdom and Murder: Aspects of Suicidal Terrorism” (the editor, Peter Bishop, and Maha Azzam). There are three appendices, consisting of eight pages of Thomas Aquinas on martyrdom, four pages of a 1983 *Concilium* article by Karl Rahner on “Broadening the Classical Concept of Martyrdom”, and an eight-page proposal by Harfiyah Haleem on “Non-Violent Options for Conflict Resolution in Islam”, which elaborates on the nine forms of *Jihad* outlined in her earlier chapter (58).

Please refer to the published article for citation purposes.

The volume is the product of on-going discussion among the group which produced an earlier volume on *The Crescent and the Cross: Muslim and Christian Approaches to War and Peace* in 1998. Much valuable material is included, for example the different views found in Hadith (22-5, 50-2, 61-2), an outline of the different views of leading contemporary Muslim thinkers, such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Mohamed Syed Tantawi, and 'Ali Gum'a (59-61), the discussion of the interesting biblical case of Samson (85-7), and Christian discussions of the respective claims to martyrdom of such modern figures as Edith Stein, Maximilian Kolbe, and Franz Jagerstatter or Mahatma Gandhi, Oscar Romero, and Jerzy Popieluszko or even Pope John Paul II (because of the attempted assassination in 1981) or Sr Dorothy Stang, who was murdered in Brazil in 2005 on account of her opposition to American logging interests (89-91). The comparative discussion with the Kamikaze pilots of World War II and the Tamil Tigers (briefly on pages 61-3 and in more detail on pages 123-30) is also interesting, as is the discussion at various points of possible Christian influence on developing Islamic thinking, both historically (25-6) and today (131-2). It is very helpful for other people to be able to share in the results of such sustained joint discussion of these themes by a group of Christians and Muslims and this is especially the case, since the book was in press when the bombings on the London Underground took place on 7 July 2005.

Please refer to the published article for citation purposes.

There are one or two puzzling features about the book, however.

Firstly, the cover has photos of two individuals, Malcolm X and Margaret Hassan, who were both murdered, respectively in New York in 1965 and in Baghdad in 2004, and who are considered by some in their respective communities to be martyrs. Hassan's case is discussed at two points in the book (on page 71, where there is an interesting comparison with the case of Rachel Corrie, who was killed in Gaza in 2003, and more fully on pages 91-2), but there is no reference to Malcolm X; his status within the mainstream worldwide Muslim community is in any case somewhat controversial. Secondly, there is some duplication between different chapters, perhaps not surprisingly if the group's discussions took place over an extended period of time, but some further editing might have been helpful, and the inclusion of a consolidated bibliography would certainly have been helpful for readers who wish to study the subject further. In that connection, the more recent study of David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* and the slightly older one by Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* would be useful supplements to this volume.

Finally, it is interesting to note that, with one exception, the chapter by Abolfazl Ezzati, which is reprinted from the journal *Al-Serat*, all the Muslim contributions to the book (Asfaruddin, Haleem, and Azzam) are by women. It is not clear whether Prof. Ezzati was a member of the group whose discussions gave rise to the book or not, but assuming that he was not, it must

Please refer to the published article for citation purposes.

surely be of interest that it was Muslim women (alongside a group of uniformly male Christians) who made such a substantial contribution to the discussion of this emotive, and often contested, theme of martyrdom.

HUGH GODDARD

*Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Nottingham,
Nottingham, UK*

REFERENCES

Cook, David. *Martyrdom in Islam*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007.

Pape, Robert. *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*. New York: Random House, 2005, and London: Gibson Square, 2006.

Abdel Haleem, Harfiyah (ed.). *The Crescent and the Cross: Muslim and Christian Approaches to War and Peace*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998.